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SUBJECT: MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND LABOR SAYS GOK
SERIOUS ABOUT IMPROVING LABOR AND ESTABLISHING SHELTER

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Ambassador met January 16 with Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Shaykh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah. Ambassador noted the of the upcoming TIP report evaluation and asked about GOK progress on addressing problems faced by Kuwait's 1.5 million foreign workers. The Minister noted that domestic workers are under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior (MOI). He acknowledged, however, that the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) chairs a multi-agency committee (MOI, MOSAL, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Kuwait Municipality) to address the situation of foreign workers -- including domestic workers. The Minister said the committee would be meeting at the end of January, and that two of the main agenda items would be standardized domestic labor contracts and a shelter to protect victims of trafficking or other forms of abuse. Regarding the contract, which has been in force since October 1, he said that the committee will discuss ways to best ensure its implementation. On the subject of a shelter, he said that MOSAL had reached agreement with the MOI on the concept and that the only remaining hurdle was to establish a location for the shelter. He told the Ambassador to expect "good news" on the shelter soon after this month's meeting. The Minister also mentioned that beginning in March MOSAL would start a regular series of meetings with the embassies of labor-exporting countries to try to improve the embassies' understandings of conditions and regulations in Kuwait as well as to improve MOSAL's understanding of the problems workers encounter.

¶2. (C) The Minister also noted that the Cabinet would be holding a special meeting on foreign workers in the near future. He said he would try to show the Cabinet that foreign labor affects all of their work and the overall security of Kuwait. The Ambassador pointed out that foreign laborers could be a security threat if not vetted properly and that the poor public image arising from maltreatment of workers hurts the attractiveness of Kuwait as a destination for investors. The Minister agreed and said MOSAL has set aside four sites for ILO-standards-compliant residential areas for workers and will set aside four more soon. (Note: Many Kuwaitis complain about having densely populated areas of single male workers near residential areas inhabited by families. End Note.) The GOK is working on partnering with the private sector to finance the construction of these areas. The Minister said MOSAL visited Abu Dhabi to see its labor cities, which he found to be impressive. He said he would be sending Assistant Undersecretary for Labor Affairs Dr. Salih Al-Shaykh to Abu Dhabi again to do more research.

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LeBaron